DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 472 067 CE 084 280

AUTHOR	Jun, JuSung
TITLE	Life, Learning, and Standing Alone: The Adaptation Process of Wives of South Korean Students to New Circumstances.
PUB DATE	2002-05-24
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Adult Education Research Conference (43rd, Raleigh, NC, May 24-26, 2002).
AVAILABLE FROM	Adult and Community College Education, Box 7801, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695-7801 ($30). For full text: http:// www.ncsu.edu/ced/acce/aerc/start.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Acculturation; *Adjustment (to Environment); Adult Basic Education; Adult Development; Biculturalism; Conference Papers; Context Effect; Cultural Background; Cultural Context; Cultural Influences; Cultural Isolation; Cultural Traits; *Culture Conflict; Data Analysis; English (Second Language); Ethnicity; Ethnography; Experiential Learning; Females; Feminism; *Foreign Nationals; Homemakers; Identification (Psychology); Interviews; Journal Writing; Life Events; Life Satisfaction; Lifelong Learning; Mothers; Participant Observation; *Personal Autonomy; Place of Residence; Quality of Life; Relocation; Role Perception; Sampling; Second Language Learning; Self Concept; Sex Role; Social Environment; Social Indicators; Sociocultural Patterns; Spouses; *Transformative Learning; World Views
IDENTIFIERS	Georgia; Marginalized Groups; Patriarchy; *South Korea

ABSTRACT

Adjustment experiences of South Korean graduate students' wives living in Georgia were examined from a feminist viewpoint. The adaptive process, its cultural meaning, and related social ramifications, was hypothesized to be an example of transformative learning. These two questions guided the study: (1) how did South Korean students' wives adapt to their new surroundings; and (2) what cultural meaning did they make of their experiences. Six college-educated women (who had resided in the United States for at least one year) who were full-time homemakers between the ages of 27 and 35 with at least one child were interviewed and observed. Their writing was analyzed and their husbands were interviewed (although the findings do not indicate the results of these interviews). The adaptation process was found to be three-staged: (1) identity crisis or culture shock; (2) overcoming through friendship formation and ESL classes; and (3) mental equilibrium through "thinking positively." The wives regarded their adaptive experiences as learning, something that went beyond the boundaries of formal education. Finally, the adaptation process changed the wives' world view by forcing them to become independent; they expressed this as "standing alone." Moving from such a passive stance to an active one conflicted with their upbringing in South Korea's patriarchal society; however, this was described as a welcome change. (The bibliography lists 11 references). (AJ)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Life, Learning, and Standing Alone: The Adaptation Process of Wives of South Korean Students to New Circumstances

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

JuSung Jun
The University of Georgia, USA

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Jun
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the cultural meanings and social ramifications of the experiences and understandings of South Korean students' wives who live in the United States in terms of feminist standpoint and transformative learning.

ED 472 067

Introduction

Every year numerous South Korean students come to the United States to study their specific academic area. South Korean students in the United States numbered 45,685 last year, and this number was fourth in the country ranking of all international enrollments (Gardner & Witherell, 2001, November 13). Considerable numbers of male South Korean students accompany their wives and child called dependents with F2 visas.

There are big differences between the United States and South Korea in social and cultural environment as well as in language. For South Korean students' wives, the successful adaptation to a new and strange country is a vital matter. They are not here to study, but just to live with their husbands. In the adaptation process, so many times, they experience trial-and-errors to find the best adaptation model. So far, the focus has been on the students, not on their wives. They are so-called outsiders, who are marginalized. Although there are significant cultural meanings and social ramifications of the experiences and understandings of South Korean students' wives, the efforts and interest of this population has been neglected. Through dynamics, conflicts, and reconciliation among members in communities of students' wives, they make the meanings for themselves. Living in the United States is significant to these women as a big life-event in their lives. The researcher was interested in the meanings of their living as students' wives in the United States. Of special interest is how, as lifelong learners, they experience the big event, and transform themselves and make the meanings for themselves. Life

CE 084 280

 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

events as benchmarks in the human life cycle give direction and shape to various aspects of a person's life (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

The purpose of the study was to explore the cultural meanings and social ramifications of the experiences and understandings of South Korean students' wives who live in the United States in terms of feminist standpoint and transformative learning. This study was an informative and significant work in terms of exploring and finding out the cultural meanings and social ramifications of the experiences and understandings of the particular women. The following research questions guide the study: First, how do South Korean students' wives adapt themselves to the new and strange surroundings? Second, in the process, how do they make the cultural meanings of the experiences and understandings of themselves as students' wives in the United States?

Theoretical Perspective

The researcher on this study is a South Korean student, therefore, this project was approached with premises that differ from earlier studies. The primary supposition, based on an experiential knowledge base, accepted foremost that South Korean students' wives, in reference to their lives and concerns, stood apart from Americans. Theoretical frameworks that use these same stances as its conceptual structures are liberal feminism and transformative learning.

According to deMarrais and Lecompte (1999), feminism is "both a theory of women's position in society and a political statement focused on gaining equal rights and opportunities for women changing existing power relations between men and women" (p. 35). Especially, liberal feminists focus on "the rights of individual women: they work to transform traditional beliefs about femininity and masculinity as well as to achieve full equality of opportunity in all spheres of life. … Liberal feminists work to transform understandings of male and female roles at home and in the workplace" (p. 36). The South Korean students' wives who grew up in South Korea's patriarchal society experience new and strange social/cultural shocks just after they arrive in the United States. Literally, they are dependent on their husband. The strange environment compels them to adapt themselves. However, it requires their active, not passive adaptation, not passive. In that process, they realize their own identities and have their own new/independent world-views about the relations of women among themselves and with men. In short, this adaptation

process means they are *standing alone*. In the light of this point, using liberal feminist standpoint was helpful to the researcher in finding answers of the research questions.

Transformative learning, in this study, was also used as an important conceptual structure. This theory stems from the need:

> for a learning theory that can explain how adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, the nature of the structures of meaning themselves undergo changes when learners find them to be dysfunctional. These understandings must be explained in the context of adult development and social goals. (Mezirow, 1991, p. xii)

Transformative learning is a theory of adult learning. Not all learning is transformative. The theory attempts to describe and analyze how adults learn to make meaning of their experience. Mezirow's (1997) approach focuses on perspective transformation. He notes that significant transformational learning involves three phases: "Critical reflection on one's assumptions, discourse to validate the critically reflective insight, and action" (p. 60). The key to his theory is change. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) characterize this as "change brought about by critical reflection on the origin and nature of our submerged assumptions, biases, beliefs, and values" (pp. 325-326). This theory, as a conceptual framework, was used as a lens and a sieve that it would allow us to investigate the cultural meanings and social ramifications of the experiences and understandings of South Korean students' wives.

Researcher's Role

Peshkin (1988) argues that "researchers should systematically seek out their subjectivity, not retrospectively when the data have been collected and the analysis is complete, but while their research is actively in progress" (p. 17). The researcher's role varied from careful listener/consultant to complete participant/detached observer. Actually, these roles changed as the study progressed. The initial role was a careful listener. As the careful listener and consultant, the researcher listened attentively to participants' words to understand the cultural meanings and social ramifications of the experiences and understandings of themselves as students' wives. Through these roles, the researcher could hear the in-depth stories of research participants. In addition, the subjectivity as a careful listener and consultant did not use the "tell it like it is common sense approach" in order to evade "hermeneutical circle."

4
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Subsequently the researcher made use of two roles; one more passive and the other one more active. The passive role was that of a spectator, watching and taking notes in a variety of parties and meetings. The latter role was an active observer, intentionally positioning myself in locations typical for the participants, to gain a better perspective on the phenomenon. In addition, the researcher attempted to suspend preconceptions by not making assumptions or taking things for granted in an attempt to understand the perspectives of the participants.

Research Methodology

Using a feminist standpoint research and ethnographic study, interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of participants' writings were conducted during the last six months of 2001 from July to December. Feminist standpoint theory posits feminism as a way of conceptualizing from the vantage point of women's lives. While, ethnographic study attempts to reveal the cultural meanings and social ramifications of the experiences and understandings of the participants.

Research Participants and Sampling

The research focused on South Korean students' wives. The researcher, as actually a married South Korean student, was concerned with how South Korean students' wives adapt themselves to new and strange surroundings. In addition, the focus was on how they make cultural meanings of the experiences and understandings of themselves as students' wives. In the study, the researcher used selective sampling procedures. Based on the research questions, the researcher chose the participants who had characteristics typical of South Korean students' wives. These characteristics are that they were primarily full-time housewives and having a child or two. Also, they have been living here at least for one year. This point was important, because the researcher expected that the participants would have many experiences in adaptation-process. Interviews with some of the husbands were used for the purpose of triangulation of data.

The participants met the selection criteria. More concretely, this purposeful sample consisted of six women between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-five, who were full-time housewives with at least one child. All of them had a college level education. One was an ex-officer with a child, two were ex-teachers with two children respectively, and the others were those who never worked in South Korea. They all had husbands who are doctoral degree students at the University of Georgia.

Data Collection and Procedures

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) categorize the methods of data collection into two general categories: interactive and non-interactive. This study primarily involved interviews and participant observation as the interactive method of data collection. Focused group interviews were also regularly used for the purpose of triangulation of data. As non-interactive methods, the analysis of participants' confessional writings was used as a data source for adding precision to other data.

Tape-recorded interviews were conducted with the women, including regular talks with their husbands. All interviews included open-ended questions developed during the study. Informal conversations with women and their husbands were also used in an attempt to gain more of an emic perspective as well as to confirm the results of observations. In addition to formal taping sessions with the participants, the researcher spent time with various participants at holiday and birthday parties, camping trips, retreats, and picnics. Participant observation was conducted through those activities.

Data from interactive/non-interactive data collection methods were recorded in fieldnotes and audiotapes. Field notes described the routines and words of participants, methods of communication, organization of events, and the constructions of relationships including the situation, participants, setting, and a diagram of the interaction and position of the participants. Interviews, focused group interviews, and informal conversations were recorded in audiotapes.

Data Analysis

Scanning of data from fieldnotes, transcripts of interviews, and supplementary sources resulted in the emergence of patterns and categories. To analyze the data from fieldnotes, the researcher followed Miles and Huberman's (1984) suggestion. According to them, data analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity such as data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification;

> Data reduction involves making decisions about which data chunks will provide your initial focus; Data display involves assembling my data into displays such as matrices, graphs, networks, and charts which clarify the main direction of your analysis; Conclusion drawing means 'beginning to decide what things mean, noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, casual flows and propositions.

> Verification means testing your provisional conclusions for 'their plausibility, their sturdiness, and their conformability.' (pp. 21-22).

To analyze transcripts of interviews, the researcher followed the conversation analysis (CA) method as presented by Silverman (1998). He presents the following principles for CA: "Always try to identify sequences of related talk, try to examine how speakers take on certain roles or identities through their talk, and look for particular outcomes in the talk and work backwards to trace the trajectory through which a particular outcome was produced" (p. 151).

Findings

Adaptation Process

Initial analysis shows that the adaptation process of the wives of South Korean students followed mostly the ensuing three-adaptation stages. The first stage of their adaptation is that of the "feeling identity crisis," resulted from the socio-cultural gap between the two completely different counties. The next stage is that of "overcoming the identity crisis" through a variety of activities such as making friends and enrolling in English-as-a-second-language (ELS) programs. The last stage of the adaptation is that of "thinking positively." Those who were in this last stage had achieved mental equilibrium through their own mechanism to resolve the problem of *identity crisis* effectively. However, sometimes the three stages overlapped each other and did no necessarily take place sequentially.

When the women arrived in the United States, they initially experienced cultural shock, aloneness, and an identity crisis. One of research participants, Sunny, recalls her early stage of living in the United States:

> Just after I came here, the biggest problem I got was that I don't know how to live here. I felt everything is strange. What is worse I felt the feeling of isolation. I was entirely cut off from the outside world….Maybe, because of the language barrier and the cultural gap….As you can guess, I could not do anything by myself. Even doing shopping…I didn't know how to checkout. And moreover, because I didn't know how to drive, I couldn't go out anywhere. In a word, I was a really stupid. Whenever I was faced by a terrible situation, I depended on others, especially, on my husband.

By making friends and enrolling in ELS programs, the women were able to gradually overcome the identity crisis in their early stage in the United States. Like an adage, "Birds of a feather flock

together," they made friends in communities that consisted of the wives of other South Korean students. Specifically, if their husbands' majors are the same, they are living in a same family housing building, or if they have children who are close in age, they could make friends easily. They have similar problems and interest. That is because housekeeping and raising children are the major responsibilities of the wives. They shared information related to them. Kim, ex-teacher in the middle school level, remembered her experience:

> Actually, as a beginner of American life, I didn't know how to live and what to do. But friends gave me lots of useful information. Let me give you an instance, they informed me about how to receive the WIC vouchers from the health department of this county, how to register my daughters to a pre-K and an elementary school, how to make special foods, also, what place is good for eating out, what place is good for doing shopping, what place is good for learning English, and so on. I can't easily remember all things, but, in a word, it's about everything. Anyway, in an early stage, their helps were an indispensable condition. In other words, it is not too much to say that "to be or not to be" depends on the friends. They were all my teachers of my life in the United States.

Through the earlier adaptation stages of American life, they could reach the stage of thinking positively. The women accepted the fact that they are outsiders in an alien world. Although they held reputable jobs or social positions in their country, they were willing to transform themselves into marginal entities. In short, they seek to establish their own identities as marginal ones. This point does not mean that they accept themselves as underdogs, but they face reality.

Learning as Life Itself

In this study, the most interesting thing is the fact that the wives of South Korean students regarded their experiences in the United States as *learning*. In other words, for each of the women in this study the act of adapting themselves to the new circumstances was an act of learning. For them learning was not confined within the boundaries of the concept of education. Rather, it went far beyond the boundary of educational concept. For the women learning means all the experiences of life-world in which they underwent learning-experience to solve their problems that functioned as disoriented dilemmas. These relate to their real life; for instance, taking care of their children, housekeeping, and learning English. Experiences of those who arrived ahead were shared and considered as valuable resources in their life and learning. Their learning are very broad, contextual, and situational. Specifically, the characteristics of learning of

the women were mostly daily life-oriented and related to concrete experiences that they met in their everyday life. In short, *learning means life itself to them.*

Lindeman (1961) argues, "Experience is the adult learner's living textbook" (p. 7). For the wives of the South Korean students, everyday life was, literally, the living textbook to have to learn. They learned by trial and error, and their experiences, the content of the living textbook, grew richer.

Standing Alone

In fact, the adaptation process of the women into American life means that they become independent. They find their own identities and establish their own world-view. The South Korean students' wives who grew up in South Korea's patriarchal society experience new and strange social/cultural shocks just after they arrive in the United States. Literally, they are dependents of their husband. The strange environment compels them to adapt themselves through an active not passive stance. In that process, they realize their own identities and have their own new/independent world-views about the relations of women among themselves and with men. In short, this adaptation process means *standing alone*. One participant of this study experienced,

> Actually, I could not help being independent, because my husband was too busy preparing for class. Since he didn't have enough time to take care of the household, I had to do everything instead of him. Of course, if here was Korea, I might not do that. As you know, in Korea the wives are likely to depend their husband. .... Anyway, now, I do, I can do everything, not depending on my husband. *I am not a bird in a cage* [italics added]. It's amazing.

Discussion

The fact that wives of South Korean students regarded their experiences in the United States as *learning* was an important finding of this study. Caffarella & Merriam (2001) maintain that learning is "a product of the individual interacting with the context" (p.55). That is, learning is an individual process. At the same time, it is not free from the context in which learning activities take place. In short, the learning of the women took place under a condition where individual and socio-cultural context interacted with each other. Adaptation into American life

required radical change of views. Through learning, they were able to overcome many difficult situations.

Mezirow (1991) notes, "Learning in adulthood is characterized by transformation" (p. 3). And "the most significant transformations in learning are transformations of meaning perspectives" (p. 38). "Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (p. 167). He maintains, "Meaning perspective refers to the structure of assumptions within which one's past experience assimilates and transforms new experience (p. 42)", and

> Meaning perspective determine the essential conditions for constructing meaning for an experience. By defining our expectations, a meaning perspective electively orders what we learn and the way we learn it... Meaning perspectives provide us with criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and ugly, true and false, appropriate and inappropriate. (p. 44).

The initialization of the process of transformative learning is a disorienting dilemma. Once one experiences a disorienting dilemma, the next part of the process is to evaluate one's perceptions and meaning schemes through self-examination and critical assessment of assumptions. Once a distorted perception is detected, one begins the process of transformation. For the wives of the South Korean students, the new surroundings were clearly a disorienting dilemma. To resolve the problem they critically reflected, and changed their meaning perspective. Through this process, they finally obtained a new worldview.

Reference

Caffarella, R. S., & Merriam, S. B. (2001). Linking the individual learner to the context of adult learning. In A. L. Wilson & E. R. Hayes (Eds.), *Handbook of adult and continuing education* (pp. 55-70). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

deMarrais, K., & Lecompte, M. D. (1999). *The way schools work: A sociological analysis of education*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Gardner, D., & Witherell, S. (2001, November 13). *International students on U.S.* Retrieved January 6, 2002, from http://www.opendoorsweb.org/Press/International_Students_in_the_US.htm

LeCompte, M. D., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Lindeman, E. C. (1926). *The meaning of adult education*. New York: New republic.

Merriam, S. B., & Caffarella, R. S. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative theory out of context. *Adult Education Quarterly, 48*(1), 60-62.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage.

Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity-one's own. *Educational Researcher, 17*(7), 17-21.

Silverman, D. (1998). Analyzing conversation. In C. Seale (Ed.), *Researching society and culture* (pp. 251-274). London: Sage.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Life, Learning, and Standing Alone : The Adaptation Process of Wives of South Korean Students to New Circumstances	
Author(s): Ju Sung Jun	
Corporate Source: Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Adult Education Research Conference. (pp.177-182).	Publication Date: May 24-26

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 1	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2A	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Sample TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2B
Level 1	Level 2A	Level 2B
[X]	[ ]	[ ]
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature:	Printed Name/Position/Title: JUSUNG JUN / Graduate
Organization/Address: The Univ. of Georgia 221 River's Crossing · 850 College Station Rd Athens, GA 30602-4809	Telephone: 706-542-3472 FAX: E-Mail Address: Jsjun@arches.uga.edu Date: 08.14.02

(over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: info@ericfac.piccard.csc.com
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)
PREVIOUS VERSIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE